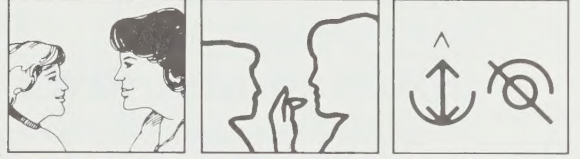


# COMMUNICATING TOGETHER



A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE ABOUT AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION

VOLUME 5, NUMBER 3

SEPTEMBER 1987





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# BREAKING BARRIERS

IAN HENDERSON

*Ian Henderson, a free-lance writer, prepared the following article about a unique theatre company that performed recently in Toronto at a fund raising social evening sponsored by the Community Awareness and Action Group (CAA).*

## The Play

Mr. Foober, the manager of the employment agency, confronts his latest applicant, Mr. Daniels, with unconvincing bluster. It is only a play, of course. In the world beyond the theatre, Mr. Daniels, who has cerebral palsy, sits in a wheelchair and has speech that is incomprehensible to strangers, might expect a more polite, if equally unhelpful, reception. Mr. Foober's lines might be thought, or muttered under his breath, but not spoken aloud. "What kind of a job am I supposed to find for him? I mean, what can he do? Nothing, nothing except drool!"

Mr. Foober's comeuppance, and the message that society's attitudes are often the greatest disability that the disabled must face, unfold in the one-act play *Given Half a Chance*, by writer and comedian Gord Payne (who happens to be legally blind). In the course of a half-hour, the play tosses down a gauntlet of humour and blunt, honest language. At one point, Mr. Daniels describes himself as a "freak who has come into their office". Such words can cause an uncomfortable stir in the audience. These moments are relieved, however, by lighter moments of vigorous farce, as when the employment agency receptionist answers the telephone with a cheerful inquiry, "Looking for a job, you slob?". Although it seeks to challenge and inform its audience, *Given Half a Chance* remains a comedy, and contrives a happy ending. The delivery of a new computer to the employment agency gives Mr. Daniels the chance to demonstrate his skills and employability. However improbable this coincidence, *Given Half a Chance* is a play committed to its message. The audience may react favourably or unfavourably, but it

does not remain indifferent.

## The Troupe

*Given Half a Chance* is a production of the Rolling Thunder Theatre Company, an enthusiastic troupe of both physically disabled and able-bodied actors that is based at Participation House in Brantford, Ontario. Since 1985 the company has given five-hundred performances across the province. Its work has been profiled in community newspapers, major Toronto dailies, and on Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's "The Journal". *Given Half a Chance* is Rolling Thunder's main vehicle, but the company's true hallmark is flexibility. In the words of Cathy Camp, who has been the director of Rolling Thunder since 1986, the group is willing to be "involved with whatever's happening. We may just do a couple of songs, rather than the play. And we don't say 'no' because of location or lack of money". If the actors of Rolling Thunder ever become complacent, their life on tour provides a quick cure. More than once, they have been booked into auditoriums or hotels that, as someone realizes only at the last moment, are not accessible by wheelchair.

Rolling Thunder — "rolling" to represent the wheelchairs used by the disabled, and "thunder" to represent the impact the company hopes to make upon public awareness — is as concerned with educating as it is with providing a quality theatrical experience. This concern is reflected in the selection of actors. The use of disabled people as actors is an obvious distinction, and receives much attention. The disabled members of the cast have had to meet, in particular, the challenge of having no previous acting experience. But, as Cathy Camp notes, "We want someone who believes in the importance of creating awareness more than in the importance of being able to say 'I am an actor'. That may change, if we reach the point of doing full-scale theatrical productions. But right now we're looking first for dedication and belief".

## Learning through Talking Together

After each presentation of *Given Half a Chance*, the actors step out of their roles to introduce themselves, explain various disabilities, and answer questions from the audience. Information is given on the ways in which



"The Cast" of the Rolling Thunder Theatre Company



technology, graphic systems and signing can now help persons whose speech is not readily understood. This discussion time is an essential part of the performance. "Attitudes are changing", says Camp, "and the company can have a great effect through mingling with the audience, dealing with people on a one-to-one basis. For many people, it's the first time they've had direct contact with a disabled person. Kids ask the best questions — 'Don't you wish you could walk?' 'Do you sleep in your wheelchair?' 'Why do you talk that way?'" The workshops also help the audience to adjust to some of the emotions that the play can generate. "I was uncomfortable at the beginning of the play", commented one spectator. "Certainly, the discussion helped. It wouldn't have been a complete evening without it".

Rolling Thunder, like many other theatre companies across Canada, must mount its productions on an uncertain financial base. At present, it is without funding, and relies on performance fees and donations. Despite this obstacle, the company is working on a new play to take on the road in September. This play will offer a series of scenes rather than the single story of *Given Half a Chance*; some of the material is drawn from the experiences of the company's members and the residents of Participation House. The script, now in progress, will be further developed in rehearsal and through improvisation. Like *Given Half a Chance*, this play is conceived as family entertainment and will present its message with humour. "We still believe in learning with laughter", says Cathy Camp.

### CAA Hosts Special Evening

Toronto had an opportunity to experience the theatre of Rolling Thunder at a performance hosted by the Toronto-region Communication Awareness and Action Group (CAA) as part of a campaign to raise funds for a CAA Conference Award. CAA has made a commitment to send an augmentative communicator to the Fifth Annual Conference on Augmentative Communication, to be held in Anaheim, California, in October 1988. The members resolved to create an

award that would cover the expenses of travel, participation, and even the cost of an attendant, for the person selected to attend. "We want someone who can benefit from the conference, and who will also contribute to the conference through his or her interaction with other conference participants, explains CAA's Lynnette Norris. An evening with Rolling Thunder, which shares CAA's commitment to raising public awareness about disability issues, seemed an ideal step toward this goal. Five hundred tickets were distributed through personal contacts and organizations involved with the disabled.

It is easy to describe the evening's success in financial terms. After Rolling Thunder had received an honorarium, \$700 had been raised for the CAA Conference Award. With an earlier donation of \$1300 by the Augmentative Communication Service at the Hugh MacMillan Medical Centre, the campaign is well on the way to its \$5000 target. CAA has invited augmentative communicators who would like the opportunity to attend the Anaheim conference to submit a short essay, in words or symbols, on "Why I want to attend the ISAAC conference". A selection committee will review the essays to determine the award's recipient.

### Impact of the Performance

It is more difficult to assess the effect of the evening upon the audience. An informal survey suggests that many people experience the play in the same way, with initial uncertainty giving way to enjoyment of its comedy. The most frequent comment, perhaps surprisingly, was about the characters who were not disabled. "It's too bad the 'regular' guys, as they're called, were made out to be such jerks", said one spectator, while another suggested that there was too great an element of caricature in the roles. Is it that *Given Half a Chance* is too simplistic? Or that it strikes a nerve? More than one person admitted the truth of Cathy Camp's remark, "People hear lines in the play that they've often thought themselves".

Is it too much to expect that a one-act play will produce a reforma-

tion of attitude as sudden and as complete as that of Mr. Foober. After all, if the status quo were so easily changed, it wouldn't be the status quo. The success of *Given Half a Chance*, and of Rolling Thunder's future productions, cannot be measured by the number of converts. Rather, the play can help people, whether sympathetic or indifferent, to gain a new perspective on the role of the disabled in society. For those focussing upon the needs of persons unable to use speech for communication, it is valuable to look at attitudes toward disability in general. Through its comedy, *Given Half a Chance* makes it a little easier for us all to look in the mirror, and to question our own attitudes and assumptions about disabled people. □

### Editor's Note:

For information and booking arrangements, contact: Ms. Cathy Camp, Rolling Thunder Theatre Co., 10 Bell Lane, Brantford, Ontario, Canada, N3T 5W5. Telephone: (519) 752-3646

For details of applying for the CAA Conference Award, contact: CAA, 46 Captain Rolph Blvd., Markham, Ontario, Canada, L3P 2P8.

### Join ISAAC Now

The International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC) offers four types of memberships:

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Members of ISAAC are entitled to reduced rates for: *Communicating Together*, *Communication Outlook*, *Augmentative and Alternative Communication* (AAC journal)

For membership application and other information about ISAAC write ISAAC, P.O. Box 1762, Station R, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M4G 4A3.



## Let Me Introduce Myself

KARI HARRINGTON



*Kari Harrington was in the original Blissymbol class of 1971 at O.C.C.C. Since then, she has completed public school at James Robinson Public School in Markham. Presently, she is a senior student at Langstaff Secondary School in Richmond Hill, taking one credit subject as well as classes in the Orthopaedic Special Education Department. We welcome Kari as the new writer of "Family and Community".*

Before I tell you about myself, I want to thank Andrew Murphy and his father for their generous contributions to this column and for sharing much of their lives with us. We will miss their writings but hope they will keep in touch with *Communicating Together*. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to carry on his work, communicating with you. I look forward to meeting many new friends in the process.

And now, I would like to tell you a bit about myself so that you will know me better. I am twenty-two years old and have cerebral palsy. This affects my speech so that many people cannot understand me. I still live at home with my family in Markham.

### How I Communicate

I have several ways to communicate. I use finger spelling and sign

language with my mom and my younger sister Linda. My dad and older brother Rob rely on my own "speech", or having me spell words to them on my tray or on my knee or anything I can reach. At school and in the community, I use an Epson speech synthesizer. When I am in a regular class, the teacher does not have time to read my Bliss board. That's the main reason I use my speech synthesizer there. In the Orthopaedic class, I can choose whichever way I want to communicate.

At school in 1985, I took a grade eleven course called "Man In Society" taught by a great teacher who knew all my needs. I enjoyed the class so much that this last year, I decided to take a grade thirteen advanced course called "Canadian Family in Perspective". Though the reading and writing level expected were beyond me, the subject was so interesting to me that I went right ahead and tried it. I learned a lot!

In that class I met a very nice student who talked to me and really took an interest in my communication. We did a research project together and made a presentation on "Attitudes to the Disabled".

Talking about presentations, I would like to tell you a bit about what I have been doing Mondays. I am in a training program at the Easter Seal Communication Institute, which teaches me how to do presentations. I will talk about it more in a future column.

In my spare time and for my pleasure, I like to listen to music, and especially to Anne Murray. I also read novels and true life stories about people who have experienced what I have experienced. Writing poems and stories is what I do most, when I want to express myself.

A few of my poems have been published in *Communicating Together*. I want to share another with you now.

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### Take Time

Take the time to look at me.  
Take the time to wonder.  
Take the time to know me.  
Take the time to talk.  
Take the time to ask some questions.  
Take the time for answers.  
Take the time to understand.  
Take the time to be a friend.

Please feel free to write to me in English or in Blissymbolics if you have any experiences or feelings that you would like to share in *Communicating Together*. My address is: 16 Jonquil Crescent, Markham, Ontario, Canada, L3P 1T4. □

\* \* \*

We received the following article from Kate Ellis in Scotland. All of us who use augmentative communication seem to share very similar problems. I especially liked Kate's "Please let me finish what I was saying" prerecorded phrase. I put it on my Epson.

### How I Communi-"Kate"

KATE ELLIS

*Sally Miller, research speech therapist at the CALL Centre, University of Edinburgh, sent us the following article written by her friend and client, Kate Ellis.*

I am twenty-three years old and I have a communication problem because of cerebral palsy. I use a total communication system consisting of eye-pointing, facial expressions, 'body language' and some speech. With speech, I usually use one-word answers although if people I'm talking to know me well, they might understand longer phrases. When I was at school, I was introduced to Blissymbols and I now have a 400 symbol chart. I indicate the symbols with a head-pointer, and I have no trouble indicating the symbols quickly and accurately — so long as my listener is able to understand that I need my head-pointer on, and the chart



placed in front of me.

Now I also use a 'MACAPPLE' communication system. This is a word processor program for the Apple computer (I have an Apple IIc) which is designed for people with disabilities, to make typing easier and faster. The system allows me to store lots of words, or whole phrases, in lists. I can print up a whole word or phrase with just one keypress.

### Communication Experiences and Strategies

I still use the Bliss chart when I'm not sitting at my computer, when I have something to say quickly, or when I am confident that the person I'm talking to can follow the Bliss well. With people who are not familiar with communication problems or with the Bliss chart, it is easy to lose track of what is being said, because there is no record. My messages are often misinterpreted and it is difficult to go back to refer to what has been said. Sometimes people don't seem to

take my messages seriously. But with the visual display on the screen, people can't ignore or misinterpret my meaning. With the MACAPPLE computer system, my communication is more effective and understandable. If necessary, I can save and print out whatever was said, and refer back to it later.

When using Blissymbols you need to have a one-to-one situation, whereas with the computer I can compose a message in advance and display it when the person is ready to read it. This gives me more control and flexibility.

Sometimes I feel I know what I want to say but it takes time for me to get it out the right way round. Once I get started I am fine. I like to be able to express myself in the way I feel is right for me.

There was a time when I was trying to communicate with people, that I couldn't get my words right in my head because I was nervous. I knew what I wanted to say, but I found myself getting all defensive, and I tended to hold back how I really felt.

I like the listener to listen to what I have to say first. Then they can respond depending on what we are talking about or discussing at that particular time. I particularly dislike people who interrupt and guess what I am trying to say. I like to be able to finish what I am saying before the other person contributes. Also I like to feel in control of the conversation.


I devised a method to cope with people who interrupt — I stored a phrase in the word list which I can get to very quickly just by typing the abbreviation code CD. It comes up on the screen "Could you please let me finish what I was saying."

The most difficult situation for me is when I am in a group of people, like a Social Work Department Review. I am saying something on my Bliss chart and the rest of the people are discussing other business, before I have a chance to put my point of view across.


I find, when I have a good conversation, it's mostly between two people. Ideally, I would like to be more patient with my listeners!□

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## ISAAC in Developing Countries

JUDY SELIGMAN-WINE

*Judy Seligman-Wine, is a speech-language pathologist, actively involved in augmentative communication since the early seventies. She emigrated to Israel in 1974, and has introduced many new programs there. Committed to ISAAC since its inception in 1981, she serves as chairperson of the Standing Committee on Developing Countries.*

A seminar on the needs and roles of ISAAC (The International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication) was held at City University in London, England, in conjunction with the Fourth International Conference on Augmentative Communication, September 1986. The seminar was planned by the vice-president and vice-president-elect for International Issues and Concerns, Drs. John Eulenberg and Andre Sylvestre respectively, and myself, chairperson of the Standing Committee on Developing Countries. The seminar was well attended with forty-six participants representing sixteen countries.

The prevailing themes which recurred throughout the day were: the need to *work together* with the local population in any given country rather than *doing for* the people; the use of local resources and solutions; the need to ensure the appropriateness and adaptability of aids in terms of cultural values and the local way of life. A preliminary step must be the identification of the augmentative and alternative communication needs within the various countries. A project to be undertaken as a result of this seminar is the development of a model for demographic studies. There exists today a very great need to disseminate information on augmentative and alternative communication in developing countries; another important achievement of the seminar was the identification of preliminary avenues for this dissemination of information.

## Editor's Note:

Readers are referred to AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) Vol. 3, No. 1 March 1987 for the full twelve page report of the proceedings of this important and productive seminar.

Additional information about current activities of ISAAC's Standing Committee on Developing Countries may be obtained by contacting its chairperson: Judy Seligman-Wine, Ramat Motza, P.O. Box 1567, Jerusalem, Israel. □

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## Augmentative Communication Begins in South Africa

ANNALU WALLER

*Annalu Waller is a rehabilitation scientist at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. She received a scholarship in 1986 that enabled her to visit North America to learn of the work being done here in rehabilitation. Her interest in augmentative communication has led her to research involving predictive text selection from a linguistic base and to active participation in the formation and development of Interface.*

The use of technology by disabled persons is a relatively new phenomenon in South Africa. The potential offered by the microcomputer as a communication aid was first realized in 1983 when the first computer was introduced at a school for cerebral palsied children in Cape Town. The computer allowed a fifteen-year-old girl to communicate with those in her environment for the first time. This success led to the acquisition and application of

several more computers.

Within a short time, requests for information about the use of these computers were being received from outside the school. This increasing interest suggested that a more formal medium for interaction was needed. Consequently, a group of concerned people formed an association named *Interface* in order that information could be shared.

From its small beginning in Cape Town, the association now has a national membership. At present, local branches have been founded in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. Although these branches are autonomous, a national coordinating committee concerns itself with matters affecting all branches. The dissemination of information, national fundraising, research and the development of training programs are the responsibility of the national committee.

The branches are involved in service commitments, education and local fundraising. The service commitment is the most important function of a branch. Often working in association with local Independent Living Centres, therapists and other voluntary workers assess the communication needs of individual clients. Recommendations are then made as to possible solutions to the specific needs of each client.

## Interface and the Communicatively Disabled

*Interface* was founded because of the need for information about the use of the microcomputer as a tool for the disabled. There is, however,



Communicating at a workshop in Johannesburg.



a fundamental lack of knowledge in the area of communication intervention for the severely disabled, nonspeaking child and adult. Technology is able to provide the means by which a person can be interfaced to a communication, education, vocation or recreation tool. But the client often requires intensive communication intervention training before specific tools can be used.

As a first attempt to develop a program, a toy library has been established in Cape Town. This library contains several specifically adapted battery-operated toys which can be activated by a single switch interface. Switches are connected to these toys, enabling disabled children to control a part of their environment.

At this stage, there is very little understanding of how to provide a severely disabled person with adequate communication. Often such an individual is regarded as mentally incapable of communication. It is at this level that the education of those working with the person is desperately needed. Although therapists and teachers are aware of alternative communication systems such as sign, gestural, body and symbolic languages, very few have been trained in the theory, teaching and use of these systems.

Having entered the field of alternative communication at a time when technology is providing many solutions, there is a danger that the technology might be seen as an end rather than the means for communication. However, although a great deal of fundamental knowledge is still needed in the area of initial communication intervention, the advances in the technological sphere need to be kept abreast of, and must be used when appropriate.

### Future Developments

Two major concerns provide the basis for future developments. The first is the training of those involved in providing services for the communicatively disabled. The second is to create an awareness of the advantages that technology holds for the disabled, thereby making it more accessible to the users.

There is a need for a communication assessment and training centre, where communicatively disabled people can be assessed and trained

before attending the school, training centre, college or place of work where they will continue their education or employment. It is hoped that this type of service will become available in the near future.

### Interface and other Disabilities

With the advent of the microcomputer, the disabled have found a unique tool for communication, education, vocation and recreation. However, a variety of individual handicaps make it difficult to utilize commercial hardware and software. Prospective users are also often unaware of exactly what the technology can offer them.

Voluntary *Interface* workers have already assessed numerous disabled people. These clients have had a range of disabilities associated with mental, emotional, sensory and physical handicaps. Subsequent recommendations have included portable typewriters, microcomputers, software, specialized hardware and software, and environmental controllers. Occasionally special equipment, such as environmental controllers, tables and floppy disc feeders, have had to be designed and built. The University of Cape Town's Biomedical Engineering Department has been

extremely helpful in the design and construction of these prototypes.

The Independent Living Centres in Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg have also been very supportive of *Interface*. Disabled clients often require the services offered by the Independent Living Centres as well as the expertise which *Interface* has to offer in the augmentative communication field.

### International Interaction

South Africa was represented recently at the annual conferences of two international associations, the first being the Association for the Advancement of Rehabilitation Technology and the second, the International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication.

It is encouraging to note that although the development in this country is very new, so it is in many overseas countries. The original work in augmentative communication systems only started in the early 1970's. Since then, the field has expanded rapidly. The advances made in microcomputer technology has provided an invaluable way of providing the disabled person with a means of interacting with his environment. □

*From the leading edge of the nonspeech communication movement*

## AAC: AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION

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# AUGMENTATIVE COMMUNICATION

## Communication → Talking;

### Part One: Nonverbal Communication That May Be Overlooked or Misinterpreted

BEVERLY VICKER

*Beverly Vicker is a speech-language consultant at the Developmental Training Center at Indiana University. She wrote this two part article in "Communication → Talking" in response to requests for material for parents and other professionals who were skeptical about communication goals that had been established for some cognitively impaired children. Communicating Together is pleased to publish this series of articles in their entirety. Permission is granted to reproduce these articles for clinical and educational use, as long as the author and publisher are acknowledged on each copy of the article.*

As a parent or educator of a handicapped individual, what is your awareness level and understanding of the function of nonverbal behaviour? To test this, let's play an adapted version of Trivial Pursuit. The questions consists of two parts: "Name three examples of memorable verbal communication; then name three examples of memorable nonverbal communication." The first part of the question is easy because there are so many possible answers. You could cite dialogue from a W.C. Fields/May West classic movie, speeches such as John F. Kennedy's inaugural speech, a book such as John Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath", or a song such as a national anthem. Regardless of whether the message was conveyed by a song or by a book, the message was verbal or language based.

It is really more difficult to think of classic examples of nonverbal or non-language based communication. Leonard Nemoy's raised eyebrow

would probably qualify as one example of this type of communicative behaviour. No verbal dialogue in the Star Trek movie and TV series could have as effectively signaled Spock's frequent skepticism or cynicism as that facial gesture. Unfortunately, other classic nonverbal behaviours may be difficult to recall.

Why should it be so difficult to think of other examples? Perhaps there are several reasons. First, although nonverbal communication occurs as part of everyone's communicative behaviour, we tend to focus consciously on the verbal message unless we become aware that the nonverbal behaviour signals a competing or different message than the verbal one. Moreover, nonverbal communication generally co-occurs within a verbal context rather than in isolation. On a soap opera, for example, a sigh may be interspersed between dialogue. Interpretations of that sigh as boredom, resignation, or burning desire would depend upon the context. Last, we may find nonverbal communication less memorable because only a limited variety of messages can be communicated that way when compared to the diversity of possibilities with a word or language based system. Thus, although we are aware of nonverbal communication and are capable with contextual cues of interpreting it, we pay less conscious attention to it and may unconsciously place more value on the verbal message.

However, the fact that less attention is directed to nonverbal communication than to verbal, does not diminish the importance of it. In normal developmental schema, nonverbal behaviour emerges before verbal behaviour. A baby will reach out for the candy before he can verbally tell you that he wants it. He may spit out food he doesn't like long before he can say "no". With an infant, we expect these behaviours and respond to them as communicating a message. After one year of age, normal toddlers quickly move through various stages of using both nonverbal and verbal communication. Nonverbal communication, however, soon becomes

secondary to the verbal. It decreases in frequency, but the child, even into adulthood will resort to its exclusive use in specific circumstances. This may happen when the child (or adult) can't find the words to express his complex thoughts, when he knows he should not say what he is thinking, or when he is so upset that expression through language is personally unsatisfactory. For example, slamming a door can sometimes be more communicative than verbally displaying anger. It is easy to forget that nonverbal behaviour once was a prominent means of communication for everyone.

If nonverbal communicative behaviour is often overlooked in the *non-handicapped* population, is it possibly overlooked when it is used by *handicapped* individuals? In many cases, the answer is "yes". Nonverbal communication may be overlooked for several reasons. Firstly, the adult may not be aware that a communication handicapped child is indeed communicating. As discussed earlier, we are more attentive to verbal speech although nonverbal behaviour may co-occur with it. Secondly, the child may not do anything to signal "Pay attention to me. I'm talking to you". Frequently communication handicapped children have not learned that they must first get someone's attention before they relay their message. Thirdly, some nonverbal behaviour is easy to ignore. When there is no surrounding dialogue to help adults decipher the message, they must rely upon situational cues and past familiarity with the child. The adult may have to work harder to understand the message and in given situations may choose not to expend the energy.

### Child Initiated Non Verbal Behaviour

Why is nonverbal behaviour so important? Well, it serves a purpose or function just like verbal communication. For example, when requesting behaviour is exclusively expressed nonverbally, the child's request is often overlooked. Requests for objects such as "cookie",



"drink", or requests for action, such as "tickle me", "Let's play hide and seek", require initiation by the child. If the child initiates very infrequently, requesting behaviour may not be expected or actively watched for by the adult. Requesting behaviour also differs in terms of how explicitly the message is signaled and this affects noticeability.

This difference in explicitness reflects a developmental factor. For example, at eight to twelve months of age, an infant is probably not able to walk. He uses eye gaze, i.e., looking at something as a way of communicating that he wants something. At this same age level, he may also place the adult's hand on the object or point with an outstretched hand in the general direction of a desired object. (Figure 1)

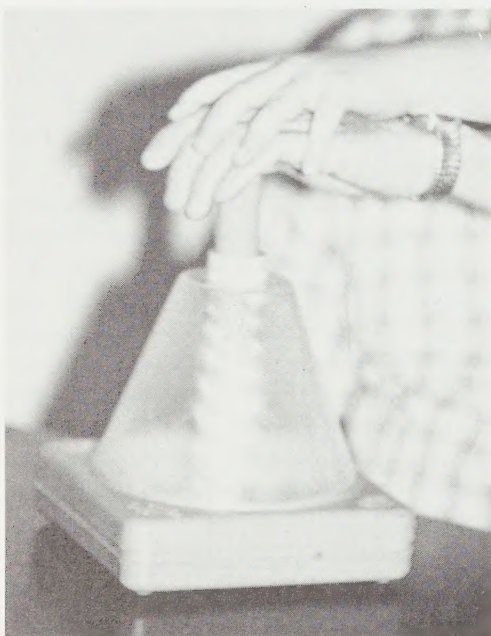


Figure 1. Putting your hand on the top may mean, "Will you push this around for me and make the balls jump around."

In the post twelve month stage, the nonhandicapped infant has developed more hand and gross motor control as well as more cognitive abilities. His nonverbal behaviours may then include the use of a pointing response with his index finger. This may be accompanied by vocalization (sounds), or verbalization (words), pulling or pushing someone to another situation and the use of conventional gestures such as a hand movement to suggest the act of washing hands. (Figure 2)



Figure 2. Pushing you to a location may be a way of saying "I want you to get something for me right now".

Directed eye gaze, on the other hand, is an example of nonverbal behaviour that is not very explicit in communicating a specific message. Unless some vocalization is used to alert the adult that the child is communicating, the message can be missed. Directed eye gaze could also be misinterpreted. In a given instance, it could mean 1) "I'd just like to watch this for awhile. Maybe when I feel more comfortable, I'd like to see the object". 2) "Bring that here; I'd like to play with it". 3) "Bring that here and talk to me about it. I'd like a) some interaction with you, b) some attention, or c) some information about the object". When a child uses the communicative behaviour of pushing you to an object, there may be less ambiguity about his communicative intent.

A given child may use the whole repertoire of explicit to vague nonverbal behaviour in his daily communication interactions. Other children's nonverbal behaviour may cluster at a specific developmental level. Thus, variability between children can often be the norm. (Figure 3)



Figure 3. Giving a visitor her purse may be a way of telling her, "Go home".

## Reactive Non Verbal Communication

Some other nonverbal behaviours are more easily noticed because they represent reactions to a situation. These behaviours can frequently be misinterpreted, however. Refusal behaviour, in particular, is often viewed as "bad" behaviour rather than communicative behaviour. If a child uses a conventional means of expressing refusal, such as the use of a negative head shake, people can easily understand the message even if it is a nonverbal one.

Children who can't talk might use looking away, covering their eyes, walking away from you, screaming, throwing materials or physical aggression as their way of saying, "no". In some cases, the child may use physical aggression such as hitting and biting because no one recognizes that when he walks away or looks away from a situation he is communicating, "No, I don't want to do that; I'm getting tired". In other words, the same message could be conveyed by two different behaviors. When the more subtle message, i.e., walking away, was ignored, the child escalated to a more noticeable means of expressing the message, i.e., hitting and biting. If the child's communicative behaviour is responded to at the escalated level, he is reinforced for using that type of behaviour to convey his message.

Responding to more socially acceptable or less intense nonverbal communication does not always mean that the adult complies with the child's wishes. Instead, acknowledgement could consist of the adult saying, "I know you're tired; we're almost finished. See, only one more".



The child's message for the adult becomes a cue for verbal acknowledgement. It also can become a cue for restructuring the situation. The adult can, for example terminate or shorten the task or introduce some new variation that might recapture the child's attention. All children express refusal in some fashion. It becomes important for adults in that child's environment to recognize the various ways that he expresses refusal and to reinforce the more socially acceptable ways. When non-compliance is viewed as communicative behaviour rather than misbehaviour, then different methods of behaviour management such as the restructuring of a task will result. (Figure 4)

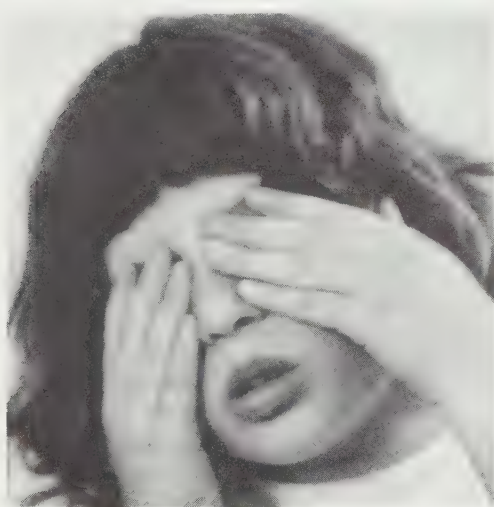


Figure 4. *Covering my eyes may mean, "Take it away; I don't want to see it".*

### Nonverbal Communication as the First Communication System

Although a child may not talk, it does not mean that he doesn't communicate. As we have seen, many messages can be conveyed nonverbally, and the use of nonverbal behaviour precedes the development of verbal behaviour in the normal schema. Therefore, recognizing and reinforcing a child's nonverbal efforts, will not prevent a child from learning a symbol based system. Communication consists of many components and the way a message is expressed, i.e., either verbally or nonverbally is only one component. Building interaction skills and developing an awareness of the effects or purposes of communicative behaviour are also important components. If a person responds to a child pointing to an object, that child has learned that

he has "power" to make something happen. If the adult also talks to the child in that situation and gives him pleasant touches, that child has additionally learned that his initiation of a request has resulted in social as well as tangible consequences. Some mentally handicapped children will remain at the nonverbal communicative level for a long time, perhaps years. Other handicapped individuals, because of profound retardation may always remain at that level.

Whether a child eventually does or does not move on to verbal speech or to some other form of communication may be irrelevant. The issue is that whenever someone is communicating, it is an obligatory social convention that we acknowledge it. Certainly there must be some caution exercised, since it is easy to over-interpret the message content of nonverbal behaviour. But there needs to be conscious awareness that communication is not restricted to the use of oral speech. Much communication by

handicapped children is occurring every day. It is important for the caretakers and professionals to *expect* communicative behaviour and to *acknowledge* it when it occurs. Once individuals start actively looking for communicative behaviour, they are often surprised by the wealth of communication activity that may be taking place. These communicative efforts are too important to be overlooked. □

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United Kingdom



## Scouts Canada and Blissymbols

Do you know any Scouts? Recently at the Thames Valley Children's Centre, a request was received for a Blissymbol version of The Scout's Law and the Scout's Promise. One of its clients, a twelve year old developmentally handicapped boy was a member of a Scout pack and made the request. He was thrilled with the translation done by Sue Tobin, a communication development aide at Thames Valley Children's Centre. What is equally exciting is that Scout badges are awarded for knowing different languages, and of course Blissymbolics qualifies.

### The Scout Promise

./ ʀs o^A(

On my honour,

⊥ 1+ ^+!

I promise to do my best,

⊥ 1 o^A( ^ ⊥ 1+ x♥+!

to love and to serve God,

→♥ + ^ Δ

my queen, my country

⊥ 1+ Δ Δ, ⊥ 1+ P

and my fellow man,

+ ⊥ 1+ ʀ 1=⊥ 1

and to live by the Scout law.

+ ⊕ < ./ ʀs □ ↗

### The Scout Law

./ ʀs □ ↗

A Scout is:

ʀs ⊕ :

helpful and trustworthy,

^ 1 + 1 ^?

kind and cheerful,

♥ 1 + ♥ ↑

considerate and clean,

^ 1 2 + 1 x ⊕

wise in his use

^ 1 > ʀ 3 + ⊕

of resources.

> ⊕ ⊕



Some time ago Kari Harrington from Markham, Ontario submitted several riddles to the "Blissymbol Talk" section and we would like to share them with you. Beginning with this issue of *Communicating Together*, Kari assumes the role of resident writer of the "Family and Community" section.

## Riddle 1

[?] 1<sub>2</sub> ^ ^ x  
 7Ω - 0 Ω<sub>2</sub> , Ω<sub>3</sub> , Ω<sub>4</sub> ,  
 Ω<sub>5</sub> < Ω<sub>6</sub> .

Question: Can you name five days of the week without saying Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday?

## Riddle 2

? 1<sub>2</sub> ^ ^ ^  
 < > 0 0 0

What do you call a person who loves hot chocolate?

## Riddle 3

? ÷ } x H ^ 0 0  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

Which burns longer, a red candle or a blue candle?

1. Day before yesterday. Yesterday. Today. Tomorrow. Day after tomorrow.

2. A Coconut

3. Neither. They burn shorter.

**Blissymbolics** is a meaning-based, augmentative communication system that stimulates both communicative and cognitive development. It can be used by persons of many ages and cognitive levels, offering a large vocabulary and opportunities to apply features of the system as communication strategies. Blissymbolics can be used independently, with a variety of picture systems and technologies, as a complement to words and spelling and as a bridge to reading.

Blissymbols used herein are derived from the symbols described in the work *Semantography*, original copyright © C.K. Bliss, 1949.

September 1982, C.K. Bliss granted an exclusive, non-cancellable and perpetual, world-wide license to the Blissymbolics Communication Institute, to provide standards for the application of Blissymbols, for use by handicapped persons and persons having communication, language and learning difficulties. In 1987, the Institute was renamed Blissymbolics Communication International and became a division of the Easter Seal Communication Institute.

The symbol composition and drawings appearing in articles are in accordance with *Blissymbols for Use*, compiled and edited by Barbara Hehner, and published by the Blissymbolics Communication Institute, Toronto, 1980.



CATHY FAIRLEY

*The Paraphrase is written for those who are nonspeaking and who are moving into traditional orthography. It offers an independent reading opportunity for the growing reader. The paraphrase is written by Cathy Fairley, consultant, Easter Seal Communication Institute.*

## **Blowing Off Steam...**

I went to a school for disabled children because I have cerebral palsy. I was given a brand new device to try. I helped to study its use. It was perfect for me.

The people doing the research asked me for my ideas. They wanted to make the device better. I felt like a co-worker — a part of the team. They made me feel important. When the study was over, my new friends went away. They seemed to be more interested in the device than in me. I was sad for a long time. Sometimes I wish that I wasn't in the study at all.

I am sad for another reason. My device is now broken. It cannot be fixed and new ones are not made.

I don't know where to find any new devices. If I do find one, maybe people will stop making that one too. This worries me.

I think researchers should be careful. Maybe the teacher could give the students' ideas to the researchers. Then the students won't get "attached" to researchers — like I did.

## **About the Writer:**

Mary Ann Merchen has a degree from university. She hopes to help others like herself by teaching and writing.

## **To Readers of Paraphrase:**

Ms. Merchen has talked about an important issue. Please tell us what you think about this. We would like to share your ideas with other readers.

Ms. Merchen's original article appeared in *Communicating Together* Vol. 5, No. 2, June 1987.



## Language Arts and Blissymbolics: An Alternative Reading Program

JACQUELINE ZARETSKY and  
GLORIA SORKIN

*Jacqueline Zaretsky and Gloria Sorkin are reading specialists with the Brooklyn Center for Multiply Handicapped Children and its South Annex. They have recently developed a structured Language Arts and Blissymbolics (L.A.B.) program for students with multiple handicaps and learning disabilities. They have found the program successful in enhancing language and reading skills of their students and have written the following account to share their experience with other special education teachers.*

For many years the classroom teachers at our center have expressed the need for a language arts and reading program that would provide positive and satisfying experiences for our students. Teachers have asked what to do with students who have little success using a phonics, whole word or multisensory approach. In our role as reading specialists, we undertook the challenge to create a highly specialized reading and language arts program to meet the learning needs of our students.

The Language Arts and Blissymbolics (L.A.B.) program is divided into learning modules which emphasize recognition of sight words, letters, sound/symbol relationships, literal and inferential comprehension skills, syntax, semantics and writing skills. This structured reading program allows students to identify, read and comprehend words and sentences using symbols in a logical manner.

We began our program by selecting three pilot classes. This enabled us to do pre and post testing of potential readers from seven to twenty-one years of age. All the students were multiply handicapped. The classes met daily with classroom teachers and developers. Teachers received training in

the specific techniques used in the L.A.B. program and were provided with a step-by-step guideline. Tests were given to evaluate the success of the students participating in the program. Teachers were also given an evaluation sheet to assess the program's effectiveness.

Feedback has been very positive. The students were unable to recognize words before the introduction of the program. After participating in the program which paired Blissymbols and words, the students were able to read words, sentences and paragraphs. They were motivated and looked forward to the reading sessions.

Since Blissymbolics contains many pictographic symbols, young children, particularly pre-schoolers and kindergarten students can utilize the L.A.B. program. The readiness skills acquired in the L.A.B. program are conducive to students establishing favorable attitudes towards reading. Since the Blissymbol is always presented with the written word, it enables non-readers to interact in group lessons. This strengthens each student's self image and facilitates peer interaction within the classroom.

We hope that the Language Arts and Blissymbolics program will become a valuable classroom "tool". Through providing a specialized and structured reading program designed for the multiply handicapped Blissymbol user, we hope negative attitudes and frustration in reading will be avoided and that the learning experience can become stimulating and rewarding. □

### Editor's Note:

The Language Arts and Blissymbolics (L.A.B.) program, will be available from EBSCO Curriculum Materials, Box 1943, Birmingham, Alabama, 35202, U.S.A.

A Seminar providing further details of the L.A.B. program and introducing it in Canada will be held at the Easter Seal Communication Institute in Toronto on November 23, 1987 (See Schedule of Events, page 22).

## "Can We Play a Game Tonight?"

ANNE WARRICK



*This is the last in a series of articles by Anne Warrick on adapting toys for children with special needs (see Communicating Together Volume 4, Number 4 and Volume 5, Number 1). Mrs. Warrick, a speech pathologist, has had many years' experience working with children and is author of the book Blissymbols for Pre-School Children. She is presently a consultant with the Augmentative Communication Service of the Hugh MacMillan Medical Centre.*

Children play in many different ways: sometimes alone, sometimes alongside a friend and at other times with playmates in a group activity. Playing games together gives children the opportunity to share their possessions, take turns, give directions, follow instructions and deal with winning and losing situations. Many children who use augmentative communication systems have difficulty manipulating small, flimsy objects such as dice, play money, or cards. These children can experience independence in play if items used in playing games are creatively adapted for their special needs.

Games for young children (three to six years) are often played by pushing or pulling knobs or levers. If children are unable to manage the original buttons, larger knobs can be substituted. Levers can be extended by taping over them with coffee stirrers or tongue depressors and strings can be attached for easier pulling of knobs. These are some ideas that can be tried to give children



independence when taking their turn.

One game which young children enjoy is called "Waterful". It is a clear, water filled, square container with, for example, an outline of squares for tic-tac-toe, or randomly placed hooks. Small discs of crosses and rings, float in the water. Slight pressure on the "whoosh" button displaces the water and markers which then fall randomly onto the rings or into the tic-tac-toe template. There are numerous games in this series. Another favourite game is "Hungry, Hungry Hippo", a game in which activating a lever causes the hungry hippo to open his mouth and swallow any number of circulating marbles. The chance in this game allows children of different ages and abilities to enjoy it successfully and equally.

### **Card Games and Board Games Can Be Adapted**

As children begin to understand and use numbers, board games and dice attract their attention. Glueing the adhesive strip from 3M Post-it notes to the underside of markers and counters helps hold them in place on game boards. "Pop-o-matic" games encourage all children to take a turn with the dice in the same manner. Some bingo cards are made with numbers that are covered by a sliding "window" rather than "loose markers". This is a good feature to watch for in board games, for children who have involuntary hand movements which tend to displace markers from the game board.

Cards, whether they display pictures (Old Maid), numbers, and suits (Rummy), or baseball and football players, become important to many children. Card holders can be bought from stores which specialize in aids for the disabled, or they can be made easily by sawing a deep groove into a piece of wood so that the cards sit in it. The holder can have a single groove, or be "terraced" to hold two or three levels of cards. An impromptu holder can be made by inverting the base of a chocolate or gift box into the lid, and sliding the cards between the aligned sides. For some children the box base has to be weighted since the adaption is light weight and can easily tip or be pushed from a lap

tray. Card holders allow children to make independent choices by hand or eye pointing and they ensure that one's partner "can't see"! However, they cannot help in the actual shuffling and dealing required in card games. Automatic card shufflers are available for children with moderate hand skills or for those with co-ordination in just one hand.

Children who enjoy word manipulation such as spelling games and crosswords, may need adaptations to the letter tiles in these games. Semi-adhesive paper can be glued to the underside of the tiles, or they can be magnetised. In both cases the child might arrange and contain his/her tiles in a box, with a metal base if magnetised tiles are to be used, in place of the small wooden racks which the game provides. Scrabble boards can be magnetised by photocopying the original board and glueing the copy to a cookie sheet of the same size. The board can then be coloured and protected by a plastic covering or lamination.

Electronic games are exciting for all children. Some are played with a partner while others allow children to "play" the computer. Either way they appear to have a fascination all their own, and although expensive, these games draw playmates from far and wide for long periods of time. "Simon" is a table top game which challenges children to repeat sequences of sounds and flashing lights by touching four coloured "plates". It can be played alone or with a partner and is a popular toy library choice. For some children it may need to be recessed into a play surface. Electronic games need careful consideration as to the speed, time and or finger co-ordination required to play them. There is no doubt of their fascination. If you can stand the noise and excitement resulting from some arcade alternatives they will "hold" youngsters all day! Good Luck!□

### **Reference List**

#### **Toys for Young Children (three to six years)**

"Waterfuls"; Tic-Tac-Toe; Ring Toss; Crabby Claws; Pottamis Pit; Pelican Ponch; Basketball. Tomy Canada Inc., 1800 Steeles Avenue West, Concord, Ontario, Canada, L4K 2P3.  
"Hungry, Hungry Hippo"; Hasbro Industries (Canada) Ltd., 2350 de la Province, Longueuil, Quebec, Canada, J4G 1G2.

#### **Dice/Board Games**

Pop-O-Matic Bingo, Pop-O-Matic Headache, Pop-O-Matic Trouble, Pop-O-Matic Puzzle Match, Ideal Toys (represented by Irwin Toys). Pop-A-Dice Frustration, Irwin Toys Ltd., 43 Hanna Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M6K 1X6.

#### **Word Games**

Alphabet, Scrabble Junior, Scrabble Senior, S&R — Selchow and Richter, represented by Chieftan Products Inc., 265 Champagne Drive, Downsview, Ontario, Canada, M3J 2C6.

#### **Electronic Games**

"Simon", Milton Bradley Canada Inc., 7615 Bath Road, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, L4T 3T1. Atomic Arcade Pinball, Tomy Canada Inc., 1800 Steeles Avenue West, Concord, Ontario, Canada, L4K 2P3.

## **Announcement Communication Management in Degenerative Diseases**

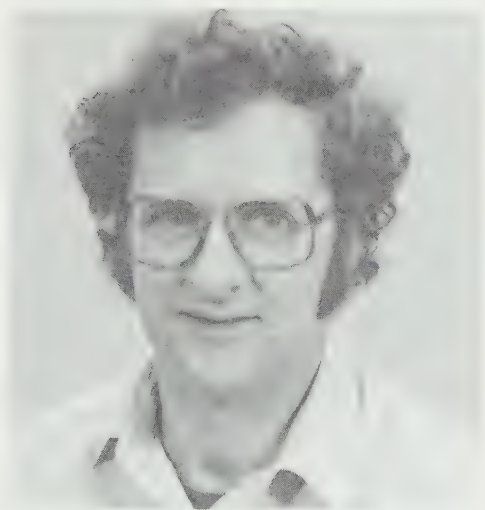
The International Project on Communication Aids for the Speech-Impaired has chosen for its 1987 Fellowship Report the topic of communication management in degenerative diseases. IPCAS is a project which operates under the auspices of Rehabilitation International through the International Commission on Technical Aids, Building and Transportation (ICTA). It involves three countries, Canada, U.S.A. and Sweden.

The report will examine the problems of and the options available to people with degenerative diseases where the prognosis involves progressive neuromuscular deterioration affecting communication and swallowing capacity. Included are amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, Huntington's disease, myaesthesia gravis and cerebellar degeneration. If you have an interest in the management of degenerative diseases and have opinion, practice or insight you are willing to share, please contact: Susan Carroll-Thomas  
Communication Disorders  
Royal Ottawa Regional  
Rehabilitation Centre  
505 Smyth Road, Ottawa,  
Ontario, Canada K1H 8M2  
Tel: (613) 737-7350 ext. 555



## Some Dreaming Toward the Future: at Home and in California

GEB VERBURG



*"Research and Publications" is written by Geb Verburg, who has been involved in the field of nonspeech communication since the mid-seventies. A cognitive scientist, Mr. Verburg is currently working as Research Assistant in several projects at the Hugh MacMillan Medical Centre.*

### At Hugh MacMillan Medical Centre

One of the displays at the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of the Hugh MacMillan Medical Centre asked, "What is your wish for the Centre's next twenty-five years?". An answer, "That we will not need places like the Centre anymore!". A great wish, perhaps prophetic: not, I'm afraid, because all physical and mental impairments will be cured, prevented or curable; but because in twenty-five years our society will have created the ways and means by which people with physical and/or mental impairments can be integrated in the community and in the community healthcare system.

### At RESNA

The 1987 conference of the Association for the Advancement of Rehabilitation Technology (RESNA)

presented technology's contributions to the dream. Yet in viewing the poster displays, walking through the exhibit space and attending paper sessions and symposia, I had a strange feeling of passing through a telescoped version of history. The devices displayed or discussed were the newest or most recent models, and yet occasionally I had the feeling that I was watching technological mastodons, or pterodactyls. There were of course many crocodiles, turtles, starfish and other surviving species and there were some new species, not yet adapted to homes and communities but with a high survival potential.

What is the role of technology in the dream for 2012? How does one recognize technology en route to extinction?

I see the emergence of a new species of technology. This adaptive technology has several characteristics:

1. It meets a need that is identified and specified by the user and an inter or trans disciplinary team;
2. It is designed for a person who will live, work, study and play in communities;
3. It will transcend the specifications of the stated need and will help to establish new behavioural patterns that will in turn create a new and wider range of functional behaviours and interaction patterns for all people;
4. It will be instrumental in creating new laws and/or funding rules, and of course new relationships, for the biggest gains are still to be made in the attitudes and actions of the nondisabled.

### California Dreaming

The third point above is the most intriguing. Two potential examples were presented in California. Dr. Alan Newall from Dundee, Scotland gave a paper on CHAT (as in chatting) dealing with a conversation-based speech predictor. The device generated greetings, small talk and farewells, three of the four elements of a conversation. It left out only the main subject or topic of the conversation. (Newall jokingly

commented that many conversations do not have a main subject or topic). Computer programs that can engage a person in a rewarding dialogue have existed for several decades (Weizenbaum's Eliza program). All that is needed — and it will not at all be a trivial task — is to provide a person who is nonspeaking with a means to control and modify the content of such computer generated dialogue. Speaking persons do not consciously select every word that is uttered in a sentence, why should a nonspeaking person have to do so?

The second dream — less outrageous but technologically in a testable stage — focused on the telephone, this underused augmentative communication device. First, imagine the house and office of the future with phones, speaker phones, video phones and directable messages. Jim Tobias presented INVOCA, a device by which number codes sent to a central computer would forward preprogrammed words or sentences to a chosen (dialed) recipient. It is a simple device lumbered with the pitfalls of the indirect selection access method. But ignore that for a moment and look at the elements: input code or signal; a central computer somewhere in an office downtown or across the province or state; and a voice output. There is nothing that prevents a person who is nonspeaking from having two telephones, one for outgoing calls and a second, speaker phone for incoming calls. A person using the INVOCA system could, in effect, make a telephone call, by entering codes in his/her outgoing phone, to his/her own incoming speaker phone, and could carry on a conversation with a person sitting in a chair opposite. The unusual part of this arrangement is that a message intended for a person sitting next to us would travel miles before it returns, interpreted and voiced into our living room. Exciting is the fact that the nonspeaking person would have immediate access to unlimited computing power. Artificial intelligence and linguistic prediction programs both requiring large, heavy



and expensive computers would be within telephone reach.

The user would be untied from the computing machine; all she or he would need is an appropriate input device, a cellular and speaker phone and unimpeded movement. Inhouse, local and long distance communication backed up by a powerful but non-hindering computer would be available.

An assistive device of the future will not be designed just for people who are disabled but for everybody. This is one lesson that we've learned from "curbcuts". As in "curbcuts", the device or adaptation benefits more people and so equalizes or integrates people in a very natural way.

The main issue is the realization that participation in society with or without technology is a right of all persons who are disabled and not an act of goodwill towards any one group. □

## COMMUNICATION OUTLOOK

### Focusing on Communication Aids and Techniques

A Publication of the International Society for

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC)

*Communication Outlook* is an international quarterly which provides a forum for individuals interested in the application of techniques and aids for people who experience communication handicaps. It is a cross-disciplinary information source as well as a reference for those wishing to contact others working in the field of communication enhancement.

*Communication Outlook* features regular sections on: commercially available aids, aids under development and components to build aids; interfacing and augmenting aids; new publications and resources; centers and groups involved in various aspects of communication enhancement; innovative methods, procedures, teaching strategies and uses of materials shared by readers; and advocacy issues, including new groups, strategies and successes.

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- **Augmentative Communication: An Introduction**, published by ASHA
- **A Protocol For The Assessment of the Communicative Interaction Skills of Nonspeaking Severely Handicapped Adults And Their Facilitators**, by Janice Light, David McNaughton and Penny Parnes
- **Recognizing and Enhancing the Communication Skills of Group Home Clients**, by Beverly A. Vicker
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## Coming to Full Circle in Augmentative Communication: The Pennsylvania Assistive Device Center

COLLEEN HANEY



*Colleen Haney is a speech pathologist who has been actively involved in the development and implementation of an augmentative communication program in Pennsylvania. The program's dramatic growth is outlined in the following personal account.*

Time and time again, after conferences, training sessions, workshops or site visits, I am asked how I became involved in augmentative communication. In answering, I take the questioner back with me to the early 1970's and to my speech therapy caseload of special education students at a special education center in southwestern Pennsylvania, Clark School, Intermediate Unit #1. It didn't take a great mind to determine that traditional speech and language therapy wasn't the answer for multiply handicapped, developmentally delayed, nonspeaking children. Ninety-eight percent of my caseload was nonverbal. Most of the students that were verbal were unintelligible to untrained listeners. I became involved out of necessity. I began searching for methods and procedures to find alternative and

augmentative communication for my students. My evening reading became anything related to alternative and augmentative communication.

I soon developed an extensive picture/symbol communication board program at Clark School. Staff cooperation was excellent and the whole school became involved. Many of the teachers were beginning to incorporate sign language in the classroom to continue my total communication approach. In the following years I was able to obtain a Form-a-phrase, Canon Communicator, Handivoice and Sharp Memo-writer. A few of my students were becoming very good at utilizing the technology of the early communication devices. An augmentative communication program was growing in Intermediate Unit #1.

### Finding Funding

We were fortunate in Pennsylvania. The Department of Education sponsored a Minigrant program each year. Teachers were encouraged to write grants for the technology they believed was important for their classrooms. The need at our school for augmentative devices was growing much faster, however than the support through minigrants. In addition, a communication device was stolen from one of my best augmentative communication system users. Out of desperation, I found myself writing letters, starting a funding drive in the community and eliciting the help of a local newspaper reporter in creating public awareness and support.

A few years later, I was employed as a research coordinator at the University of Pittsburgh with the Augmentative Communication Project developed by Donald B. Egolf. The Project studied augmentative communication users of the Metropolitan Pittsburgh area. Again and again the common concern emerged; not enough devices, systems or training available to meet the needs of students who were able to use alternative and augmentative systems.

### Providing Support in Pennsylvania

Today I am the Augmentative Communication Specialist for the Pennsylvania Special Education Assistive Device Center. I have come full circle from the clinician in the field asking for funding and searching for education. I have become a member of a project that provides education, technical support and augmentative communication systems to eligible candidates in Pennsylvania. In 1984 the Pennsylvania Assistive Device Center (ADC) was created to provide school personnel with consultation, training and resources regarding state-of-the-art high technology assistive devices. The Center, funded by the Department of Education, Pennsylvania Bureau of Special Education, received allocations from P.L.94-142 money to initiate a method to distribute and support assistive devices for students zero to twenty-one years of age. The project focused on communication, writing aids and computer access at this time.

Pennsylvania is a state representing twelve million people and covering approximately 45,000 square miles. Within this population, approximately 200,000 children have been identified as having handicapping conditions that could possibly warrant ADC services.

In order to distribute the adaptive equipment effectively and efficiently, a long term loan program was designed. In the first year of the loan program, the ADC received applications from 268 therapists and teachers for assistive devices. Of the 268 applications received, 139 were funded. Once the equipment was distributed to the schools it became necessary to train teachers, therapists and parents in the technology and implementation of the communication systems. In addition, the Assistive Device Center elected to provide on-going education and technological support to the applicants. This was accomplished in the following ways:



- printed materials
- toll free hot line phone service
- Local Augmentative Specialist (LAS) network
- videotape training materials
- equipment training workshops
- site visits
- ADC newsletter and users network
- Augmentative Communication Profile
- short term loans

### Support to Loan of Devices

Each recipient of a device through the ADC's Long Term Loan Program received a reference note book. Each notebook contained an introductory letter, an article on augmentative communication, information on the ADC and an explanation of the LAS Plan. Sources of assistance and information, a list of ADC follow-along activities for Long Term Loan recipients and forms to record information on equipment components such as serial numbers and model numbers were included. Sheets to log important phone messages, notes or problems comprised the remaining pages of the notebook.

In order to be available within a few moments to anyone within the geographical area, two toll-free hot lines were installed at the Assistive Device Center, answering questions on hardware, technological problems and device programming.

### Local Augmentative Specialists' Network

Another attempt to provide immediate help and feedback to the recipients was the creation of a Local Augmentative Specialists, (LAS) network. Each Intermediate Unit in Pennsylvania recommended individuals from their staff to be trained as Local Augmentative Specialists. A team approach was encouraged to include a speech pathologist, an occupational therapist and/or a physical therapist, and an educational technologist and/or teacher. Responsibilities of the Local Augmentative Specialists were to include provision of local support to the long term loan program conducted by the ADC, consultations relating to the assessments of stu-

dents and the selection of appropriate communication equipment.

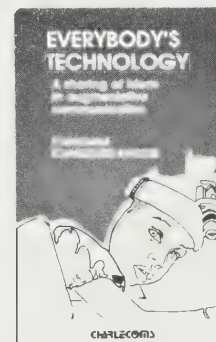
These specialists attended workshops that included presentations by the ADC staff members, guest lecturers, and "hands on" experiences with the actual devices, audiovisuals and print materials. They were given a basic "starter" group of items and resource materials selected by the ADC staff. These clinical tools were gathered in a suitcase that was called the LAS assessment kit. In addition to the clinical tools and books, the LAS kit included video tapes, demonstrating the basic use and programming of the most currently popular and commercially available assistive devices.

The professional staff of the Assistive Device Center made site visits throughout the year to long term loan recipients, giving the local augmentative specialists, therapists, teachers and students the opportunity to discuss and evaluate the augmentative communication system with the guidance of the ADC specialists. Items of high priority for examination and discussion at each site visit included: selection technique, input mode, seating, positioning of the device, symbol and vocabulary selection, selected output modes, motivation for device usage and communication interaction skills.

The Long Term Loan Program is now in its third year. Over 300 electronic systems are in the field. It is estimated that by the end of the 1987-88 school year, the Pennsylvania Assistive Device Center will have provided over 500 augmentative communication devices for students and educational training and support services for staff in Pennsylvania. It's very exciting and satisfying to have been part of a new program such as this. It's good to know our program is available to students like those I had such concern for in the seventies. It's great to come full circle.

### Editor's Note

For additional information, contact: The Pennsylvania Assistive Device Center, Elizabethtown Hospital and Rehabilitation Center, Elizabethtown, PA 17022, USA. Phone: (717) 367-1161 ext. 104□



## EVERYBODY'S TECHNOLOGY

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by CHRISTIANE CHARLEBOIS-MAROIS, B.Sc. O.T.

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## Electronic Communicators: Are They For Everyone?

LYNN SMITH

*Lynn Smith is a teacher of speech and language impaired individuals. She is presently teaching at the Helen Field Trainable Centre in Detroit, Michigan. In the following article she outlines some of her concerns about the effectiveness of electronic equipment with trainable, mentally impaired/severely multiply impaired persons.*

The exchange of ideas and feelings is second nature to the very existence of man. Being able to indicate wants and needs, likes and dislikes and being able to take part in conversation, asking and answering questions is what communication is all about. But what about the non-speaking population? More specifically, what about the nonspeaking population which is also orthopaedically handicapped and trainable mentally impaired? How extensive is the communication network for these individuals? When a child's needs are anticipated or when his likes and dislikes are assumed, or when a "yes" or "no" response is all that's expected, how vital can his need to communicate truly be?

My experience with trainable mentally impaired/severely multiply impaired (TMI/SXI) students has shown that this communicative need is not nearly that of the intellectually higher functioning. They are, in the main, a passive group, interacting only at the invitation or encouragement of others. Would a voice output communication aid, also known as VOCA, really enhance the communication capabilities of these students?

It has been my experience that in lower socio-economic areas, communication becomes secondary to survival. By the time a severely handicapped child is communicatively ready, his/her apathy toward communication can be related to the parents' or caregivers' limited time, and their frustration in caring for a severely multiply impaired child. Too often, extended families and/or

minimal income add even greater stress to raising a dependent, non-verbal child. Do parents really need the added responsibility of caring for a costly communication device?

As a teacher of speech and language impaired (TSLI), I'm torn between fighting for the right to communicate for my students while realistically facing the inherent battle of funding and insuring the electronic communicators.

A number of parents have told me that they have no trouble understanding their own child and not to bother sending "that board" home. Other parents are still waiting for their child to talk and want no part of a communication board. Few of these parents visualize their children as functioning outside of the home environment and they are not always co-operative with those devising a communication system for their children. Would these same parents actually participate in the tremendously time-consuming task of selecting and assembling vocabulary for a VOCA? It is my experience that many will not.

Granted, parents are an integral part of the successful use of augmentative communication systems, electronic and nonelectronic. It is becoming evident that more parents need training to assist them in better understanding their children's verbal limitations and the augmentative and alternative communication systems available to their children.

But what about the nonspeaking student himself? Are the younger students the comfortable victims of learned helplessness? Are the older students just satisfied with communication boards and therefore unwilling to adjust to the often mechanical voice of an electronic communicator? Perhaps years of dependence and lack of control over their own environment have reduced the desire to verbally interact. Whatever the reason, if the nonspeaking student chooses not to communicate, I fail to see that the VOCA will provide the magical solution.

Though state of the art electronics is constantly advancing, I feel that

VOCAs remain very limited in their ability to meet the communication needs of the majority of these students. The cost of most VOCAs is highly prohibitive. Breakdowns will and do occur leaving the user helpless. Many have a limited capacity for vocabulary or require assistance in preparing for its use. Some VOCAs are awkward and difficult to transport. The synthesized voice with which most are programmed is often difficult to understand and lacking in any normal intonation. Lastly, despite rigorous efforts to incorporate the VOCA into daily use, I've seen too many students soon lose interest in the device. Overlays are lost or damaged; programmed vocabulary does not meet the students' needs; reprogramming is costly.

To help combat the negative aspects in applying VOCAs with these students, I see a need for stringent guidelines for vocabulary selection and development and the co-operation of all who will interact with the VOCA user, before a purchase is made. Some students are good candidates for VOCAs, but their parents/caregivers/teachers must be supportive and encouraging for the VOCA to be effectively used. I see a brighter future for VOCAs with the trainable mentally impaired/severely multiply impaired users only when some of the many problems are resolved. □

### Editor's Note:

We encourage responses that can be shared in future issues of *Communicating Together*. Write to us with your thoughts.



# SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

## ESCI Special Interest Seminars

### In Toronto, Ontario

The Easter Seal Communication Institute (ESCI) holds a series of one-day seminars throughout the year on a variety of topics related to the application of augmentative communication. Seminar topics include:

- Language Arts and Augmentative Communication, October 6
- Classroom Dynamics with Augmentative Communicators, October 7
- Student Interaction with Augmentative Communicators, November 4
- Curriculum Adaptations for Augmentative Communicators, November 5
- Reading through Blissymbolics, November 23, 24
- Practicum to Blissymbolics Independent Study Program, October 5, and November 6
- Selecting Graphics for Communication Boards, December 3, 4

Contact: Training Coordinator,  
Easter Seal Communication Institute,  
24 Ferrand Drive, Don Mills,  
Ontario, M3N 3N2.  
Telephone: (416) 421-8377

## Augmentative Communication...Working Together

### In Denver, Colorado

- October 16-18, 1987  
Stouffiers Concourse Hotel

A clinically oriented program, sponsored by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Foundation (ASHF) in conjunction with the International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC) and the Communication Aid Manufacturers Association (CAMA)

Contact: Chase Raiford, ASHF,  
10801 Rockville Pike, Rockville,  
MD 20852, USA.  
Telephone: (301) 897-5700

## Reading through Blissymbolics

### In Toronto, Ontario

- November 23, 24, 1987  
Day One: *Reading through Blissymbolics — a Structured Approach*. Introducing to Canada, the Language Arts and Blissymbolics (L.A.B.) program developed by guest speakers Gloria Sorkin and Jackie Zaretsky.
- Day Two: *Reading — the Transition from Blissymbols to Print*. A flexible student centred approach toward helping students make the transition from the reading of Blissymbols to the reading of traditional orthography.

## Selecting Graphics for Communication Boards

### In Toronto, Ontario

- December 3, 4, 1987  
Incorporating videotapes of presenters at previous Graphic Seminars, this seminar will address the practical task of creating effective communication boards. Selection and arrangement of graphic components for different types of students will be covered. Reference will be made to the many picture sets and systems available in North America.

Contact: Training Coordinator,  
Easter Seal Communication Institute,  
24 Ferrand Drive, Don Mills,  
Ontario, M3C 3N2.

## ISAAC Conference in Canada

### In Toronto, Ontario

- November 20, 1987  
Contact: Dr. Peter Lindsay, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education,  
252 Bloor Street West, Toronto,  
Ontario M5S 1V5.

## ISAAC Conference in Europe

### In Milan, Italy

- October 15-17, 1987

Contact: Aurelia Rivarola, Via  
Gozzano 4, 20131 Milano, Italy

## Technical Resource Centre Workshops

### In Calgary, Alberta

- November 26 - December 1, 1987  
Participants may register for any one or combination of the following topics: Environmental Controls, Aids to Daily Living; Augmentative Communication; Microcomputers: Selection and Application; Microswitches: Adaptive Firmware Card  
Contact: Technical Resource Centre,  
#100, 525 11th Avenue S.W.,  
Calgary, Alberta, T2R 0C9  
Telephone: (403) 262-9445

## ASHA Annual Conference

### In New Orleans, Louisiana

- November 13-16, 1987  
Contact: Annual Conference, ASHA,  
10801 Rockville Pike, Rockville,  
MD 20852, USA.

## About the Publisher

The Easter Seal Communication Institute (ESCI), formerly the Blissymbolics Communication Institute, established in 1975, has worked since its inception toward enhancing the lives of nonspeaking people. In its early years the Institute's primary focus was the development and application of Blissymbolics as an augmentative communication system around the world. This role continues through Blissymbolics Communication International, a division of ESCI, but within a broader mandate that reflects the philosophy and perspective of its professional staff.

ESCI supports effective communication by nonspeaking people through:

- (1) advancing augmentative communication techniques and strategies that contribute to cognitive, social and emotional growth;
- (2) drawing attention to the quality of the learning experience and identifying those types of augmentative communication instruction that contribute to cognitive, social and emotional growth;
- (3) educating, informing and influencing those who are in a position to make positive life changes for nonspeaking people.



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